



The need for clean energy solutions

By **Bob Fliner**
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As this nation moves further into this new millennium, we have a rare opportunity to move toward a new energy future. As Congress develops energy legislation, it should embrace policies that protect the environment and clean the air, improve energy efficiency, promote clean and renewable energy sources, and protect consumers from the wild price fluctuations in our current energy markets.

The energy plan passed by the House of Representatives in August is a step in the wrong direction. It is good for polluters, but bad for consumers and the environment. This plan repeats the same pattern of dirty energy dependence that has led us to where we are today — fluctuating gas prices, global warming, pollution and smoggy summers, according to a recent Knight Ridder analysis.

Arguing that we need to reduce our dependence on foreign oil, the House energy plan allows oil and gas drilling in the pristine Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which the U.S. Geological Survey estimates contains only a six-month supply of oil, which industry

says would not reach us for 10 years. Yet even in the face of dwindling oil reserves, the House in August rejected an amendment to increase fuel economy standards for SUVs and light trucks, which would have conserved 1 million barrels of oil per day — more than twice the maximum daily yield from the Arctic Refuge. This was disappointing because if we raised fuel-efficiency standards to 40 miles per gallon by 2012, the county of San Diego would save nearly 1.4 million gallons of gasoline and nearly \$425 million by the end of 2012. This common sense measure both protects the environment and saves consumers money.

The House plan also benefits polluters at taxpayers' expense. Wooed by \$2.5 million in campaign contributions from big oil, coal, nuclear and auto industries in the 2000 election cycle, the House passed an energy bill that includes \$38 billion in budget-busting subsidies over 10 years to these polluters while offering minimal incentives for energy efficiency and renewables. Here in California, the House bill would cost taxpayers nearly \$4.3 billion over the next 10 years.

Meanwhile, the Environmental Protection Agency is considering rolling back a key enforcement mechanism of the Clean Air Act called New Source Review, which cleans up some of the nation's oldest and dirtiest power plants. Unfortunately, because of weak enforcement of the New Source Review rules, there are hundreds of old, coal-burning power plants and oil re-

fineries that are operating with little or no pollution controls. The Department of Justice found that violators of the rules emitted tens of millions of tons of pollution illegally. The New Source Review rules are designed to stop this charade by forcing old plants to meet modern standards. By enforcing the Clean Air Act on our nation's old and dirty power plants, we could eliminate enough air pollution to prevent over 1,200 asthma attacks and over 11,000 missed work days in California.

The energy debate will soon reach a pivotal point on the Senate floor. At this crossroads, our legislators will have to ask some difficult questions that the House energy legislation failed to address. Do we continue down the path of exploitation of dirty, unsustainable fossil fuels and nuclear power? Or do we choose an entirely different path toward clean and renewable energy sources, energy efficiency, and strong pollution controls for power plants?

San Diegans should demand that the Senate support cleaner, more sustainable energy solutions. Specifically, the Senate should support proposals to prohibit oil and gas drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and on public lands, increase miles-per-gallon standards, end taxpayer subsidies for polluters, require significant energy production from renewable energy sources, and clean up the nation's oldest and dirtiest power plants. By taking these steps, we can achieve a new, cleaner and safer energy future.

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